BLOODY SUNDAY: 50 YEARS ON

FRONT PAGE OF 'THE STARRY PLOUGH' FROM JANUARY 1972. ARTICLE BY NELL MCCAFFERTY

THE STARRY PLOUGH

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FOR A WORKERS' REPUBLIC

THERE'LL BE ANOTHER DAY

BLOODY SUNDAY was carried out with one objective. The British Army decided coldly and deliberately to shoot the risen people off the streets. We were shot with our backs turned, in some cases, with our hands in the air as we went to rescue the wounded. We were killed on the barricades, in the courtyards . . . and a few died God knows where. The vultures picked them up first. But the siege goes on. The 808 acres of Bogside, Brandywell and Creggan remain free. Forty of the forty-two entrances to Free Derry remain barricaded.

Sunday, bloody Sunday, was a fine day and a foul day. It was a fine thing to swing down Southway, thousands of us singing, to pick up thousands more of our comrades at the Brandywell. And then to swell through the Bogside where it all began four years ago. Do you remember? . . .

We asked them to ban the Corporation, and they said no, and then they banned it. We demanded houses and they said no, and then they built them. We demanded that Craig should go, and they said no and then he went. We told the police to leave the Bogside and they said no — running all the way back to barracks. And when Sam Devenney died, paying the price of it all, we thought it more than we could bear, but we did. Death was strange then. Death is no stranger now, but the price is higher, and no easier to bear. No one who died was a stranger to us.

What impossible things did we demand this time? That our internees be freed? That we walk on our own streets, that the Stormont cesspool be cleaned up — even the S.D.L.P. couldn't bear the stink. For the least of these and the best of these, thirteen men were murdered last week. Let it be said of them with pride, they died on their feet and not on their knees. Let it not be said of us they died in vain.

Stay free, brothers and sisters. There'll be another day.

HUMAN LIFE COUNTS FOR LITTLE WHEN THE POWERFUL NEED TO STAMP OUT RESISTANCE

When the State kills its citizens, it must be held to account. Otherwise, what can democracy mean?

It is not a coincidence that the forces which refuse to come clean about Bloody Sunday are the same as want to hide their role in other areas of life.

Neither is it a coincidence that those who seek the middle ground on Bloody Sunday also fudge the need to fight on any other front.

The people who commissioned Bloody Sunday are the same as proclaim their belief in equality while propping up the rich and keeping the lower orders down.

They say they are working for world peace while squandering billions on weapons of mass destruction for use by some of the most odious regimes on earth.

They endorse the need to turn to natural energy in order to save the planet while making profit from fuelling the fires which scorch the earth.

They talk of democracy and human rights but are ever ready to defend torture and imprisonment without trial when they fear their privileges are in peril

It's at moments like Bloody Sunday that their deceit is ripped off and the ugly reality of their role is exposed.

Bloody Sunday was a microcosm of the way human life counts for little when powerful interests feel a need to stamp out resistance.

We cannot allow Bloody Sunday to be dismissed as an isolated incident which we should now pipe down about and put in the past.

It is not - or at least not only - a discrete episode from Derry's history. It is a current issue of global significance.

If the journey towards the truth which we have undertaken so far is not to prove futile, we must keep on to the end of the road.

It happened on a Sunday afternoon
On a lovely bright crisp winter's afternoon
On a perfect day for walking
There was gunshots, stones and bullets
On a lovely bright crisp winter's afternoon
There was chaos, panic and death
Disbelief upon the faces
Fear and bewilderment
The seconds seemed so long
They're firing bullets at us
It was not supposed to be like this
Awesome to behold
And then our minds locked shut

- Christy Moore

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SAVILLE'S REPORT WILL NOT BE LAST WORD ON KILLINGS

In some circles it's considered close to blasphemy to question any aspect of Saville's Bloody Sunday report.

It's more or less forbidden in the mainstream media to point out that the report was deeply flawed - and on one important matter downright dishonest.

Everyone involved in the Bloody Sunday campaign made a holiday in their heart when the victims were officially pronounced innocent. Their exoneration had been achieved against the odds by the indomitability of their families and those who had marched with them down through the years. That was something to celebrate, which we did, loud and long. But it can't be the end of it.

We cannot let Saville's allocation of blame for Bloody Sunday be recorded as the "official" truth, to be included in future histories as established fact. The idea that a single mid-rank officer and a bunch of rank-and-file soldiers carried out the massacre on Rossville Street on their own is implausible on the face of it. It's just not what happened. If this version isn't challenged now it will come to be seen as unchallengeable.

It was senior representatives of the British State, political and military, who brought the blood-storm about. Putting all the blame on the lower orders would be the equivalent - the scale of the crimes might be different but the same principles apply - of the Nuremburg tribunal sending the prison guards to the gallows but saving the necks of the top Nazis.

History must be put straight about what happened in Derry. Those who gave the orders, more than those who merely carried the orders out, should be named and shamed and made to pay a price commensurate with their crimes.

The structure of power which gave them their authority and cloaked their guilt from view - the capitalist system in the service of imperialism - should be identified too. Only in that way will future generations be equipped to recognise the conditions in which Bloody Sunday was rooted.

The brutes at the bottom should not be made to shoulder all the blame for the crimes contrived by the men at the top.

THE VICTIMS OF THE BLOODY SUNDAY MASSACRE

Top - Paddy Doherty, Gerald Donaghy, Jackie Duddy, Hugh Gilmore, Michael Kelly, Michael McDaid, Kevin McElhinney.
Bottom - Bernard McGuigan, John Johnston, William McKinney, William Nash, James Wray, John Young

'Culture of tolerance' gave paras green light for Derry murders

Logic stretched beyond limit to clear top brass

Saville refers in his report to submissions from representatives of the families that "in dealing with the security situation in Northern Ireland generally, the authorities (the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland Governments and the Army) tolerated if not encouraged the use of unjustified lethal force; and that this was the cause or a contributory cause of what happened on Bloody Sunday. We found no evidence of such toleration or encouragement."

On the face of it, this was puzzling. Newspapers and radio and TV reports of the period had carried regular complaints from local people of violence by soldiers against unarmed civilians which might have suggested toleration if not encouragement of unjustified force. The most egregious example had come six months before Bloody Sunday when the Paras were involved in killing 11 unarmed civilians over three days in Ballymurphy in west Belfast.

Toleration of this behaviour might have been inferred from, for example, the fact that no inquiry had been held into the Ballymurphy massacre nor was any soldier disciplined or statement issued by anyone in authority expressing sorrow or regret.

Saville's conclusion that there was no evidence of a "culture of tolerance" would be unremarkable if by "evidence" he meant testimony to the Inquiry. But he had at an early stage declined to examine prior events in the North on the ground – in itself not unreasonable – that to subject the Ballymurphy incident, for example, to the same level of scrutiny as Bloody Sunday itself would have made the Tribunal's task impossible.

It is this which makes the statement that, "We found no evidence…" puzzling: the Tribunal had decided not to try to gather such evidence.

General Ford in particular would have known of the Paras' involvement in the Ballymurphy massacre. He had arrived in the North to take up his post as army no. two in the first week of August 1971 – a few days before the Ballymurphy events: the killings were his baptism of fire, which it is difficult to believe he would have forgotten. But Saville finds that he neither knew nor had reason to know that the soldiers he sent into the Bogside might fire unjustifiably.

It is equally puzzling that Saville accepted Jackson's explanation of the role he had played in compiling the "shot-list" which was to form the basis of the account of Bloody Sunday offered in the aftermath of the atrocity by British military and political leaders.

Jackson testified to the Inquiry in London in April 2003 that, although he had been in the Bogside in the vicinity of the shooting, he had seen little of the events under scrutiny. He made no mention of afterwards compiling a list of the shots fired or of writing any other description of what had happened.

A different version of Jackson's role began to emerge the following month during evidence from Major Ted Loden, commander of Support Company of the First Paras, which had inflicted all of the casualties. Loden described how, late in the afternoon of Bloody Sunday, he had taken statements from the shooters and plotted map references showing in each case the location of the shooter and of his target and had noted the soldier's account of why he had fired – the man he aimed at had been armed with a gun or a nail or petrol bomb etc.

He explained that he had interviewed the soldiers as he sat in the back of an armoured vehicle in the gathering dusk at Clarence Avenue a few hundred yards from the scene of the killings, with the map spread out on his lap and by the light of a battery-powered lamp. He recalled he had listed 14 "engagements".

However, when a number of documents including the original of the shot-list were produced to the inquiry, they turned out to be not in Loden's handwriting but in the handwriting of the now Chief of Staff, Michael Jackson.

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How could this have come about, Loden was asked. "Well, I cannot answer that question," he replied. None of the shots described in the list conformed to any of the shots which evidence told had actually been fired. Some of the trajectories described took bullets through brick buildings to find their targets. The other documents in the Chief of Staff's hand were personal accounts of the day's events by Wilford, the three para company commanders present and the battalion intelligence officer.

None of these had given evidence of the debriefing session which this must have entailed; neither had Jackson made mention of any such exercise in his initial statement to the Inquiry or from the witness stand in April.

In their statements to the Inquiry, none of the soldiers whose shots were included on the list mentioned being interviewed by either Loden or Jackson about firing the shots.

'I do not recall'

Recalled to the stand in October, Jackson explained that he had forgotten all about these documents when giving evidence in April, but had recovered a "vague memory" after learning that they had been produced to the Inquiry and put to Loden. Under questioning, Jackson seemed hampered by poor memory, on more than 20 occasions using phrases along the lines, "I cannot remember," "I do not recall," "I have only a very vague memory."

Saville resolves one obvious contradiction by accepting both Loden's original claim that he had written out the shot-list and Jackson's subsequent explanation that he must have copied Loden's script verbatim, although he could offer no explanation why he might have done this or recall who had asked or ordered him to do so. Loden's own list, if it existed, has never been found.

Saville rejected suggestions that "the list played some part in a cover-up to conceal the emerging truth that some innocent civilians had been shot and killed by soldiers of 1 Para. It is not explained exactly how this conspiracy is said to have worked." Having declared that it was not clear how a cover-up based on the documents might have worked,

Saville continues that, "the list did play a role in the Army's explanations of what occurred on the day." He cites an interview on BBC radio at 1am on the day after Bloody Sunday in which the army's head of information policy in the North, Maurice Tugwell, used the list as his basis for explaining the "shooting engagements".

Elsewhere, Saville finds that "information from the list was used by Lord Balniel, the Minister of State for Defence, in the House of Commons on 1st February 1972, when he defended the actions of the soldiers." (The shot-list was also distributed to British diplomatic missions around the world as a guide for answering questions about the killings.) Saville seems not to have considered a conclusion that here we had not just evidence of a conspiracy but clear sight of the conspiracy in action, and with Michael Jackson had been at the heart of it.

The officers lied

Had this been among Saville's findings, Jackson would have been branded as having concocted a series of lies to cover up unjustified and unjustifiable killings. And Mr. Cameron would not have been able to make the Commons speech which was widely to be hailed as a major contribution to reconciliation and even healing in Ireland.

The officers lied. The inquiry stretched logic beyond its limit to legitimise the lies and report them as truth.

Job done.

'The minimum force necessary to restore order is to shoot ringleaders'

The fact that Jackson was able to perjure himself with such aplomb to Saville might be put down to the fact that he was an old hand at the bare-faced lying. The string of untruths he had told under oath to the inquest into the Ballymurphy massacre in May 2021 had confirmed his uncommon mendacity.

Three weeks before Bloody Sunday Major Gen Robert Ford, Commander of Land Forces in the North, wrote in a memo following a recce to Derry that he was "disturbed" by what he regarded as the soft attitude of local army and police chiefs to the Bogside.

He told that, "I am coming to the conclusion that the minimum force necessary to achieve a restoration of law and order is to shoot selected ringleaders amongst the DYH [Derry Young Hooligans]."

Having considered this memo, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Harry Tuzo, commissioned a battle plan for Bloody Sunday, Operation Forecast, and arranged with Belfast commander Brigadier Frank Kitson, to "loan" 1 Para to travel to Derry to help implement the plan.

Six days before Bloody Sunday, Ford overruled objections to the plan from Derry commander Brigadier Pat MacLellan and local RUC chief Frank Lagan.

Two days before Bloody Sunday, the commander of the Derry-based Royal Green Jackets, Col. Peter Welch, protested to MacLellan about the proposed use of the Paras. He was rebuffed. Welch then told MacLellan that he would go over his head and take his concerns to HQ NI in Lisburn.

This was a jolting thing for one officer to say to a superior about an imminent operation.

In his statement to Saville, Welch told that MacLellan had responded that this would be a pointless exercise since the decision to use the Paras had been taken "at the highest level." Welch said that he had understood this to mean Government level.

Welch then 'phoned an old friend from military college, Col David Ramsbotham, who had meanwhile become chief adviser to the Chief of the General Staff, General Michael Carver, asking him to alert his boss to what he saw as a potential disaster in Derry. Carver was due to attend a cabinet meeting a few minutes later.

It may be that Carver relayed the concerns of senior officers to ministers. Or perhaps, not. At any rate, Operation Forecast went ahead.

On the day, Ford travelled to Derry, although with no operational role, and took up position at the bottom of William Street beside a barbed-wire barricade. Just after three o'clock, the barricade was pulled aside and the paras poured through.

News footage shows Ford with arms raised, shouting, "Go on the paras! Go on the paras!"

We know what happened next.

'You wait your life for chance to kill'

The Parachute Regiment takes pride in its propensity for extreme violence. Its main rival for recognition as the roughest, toughest guys on the block, the SAS, is commonly jeered at in Para memoirs.

In "Contact", a vivid account of deployments in Belfast and South Armagh, ex-para A.F.N. Clarke relates an incident in which Gardai stopped a car on the southern side of the border, discovered it packed with SAS men in civilian clothes, armed to the teeth. The gardai arrested them. Clarke comments: "Well, if that's the elite, what the fuck must the rest of us be like? Cowboys the lot of them. There are some guys I recognised who failed our selection tests…I wouldn't give them the time of day. They are a joke."

Para memoirs are crammed with accounts of bone-shattering fights initiated by themselves against men from other regiments, all ending with the "crap-hats" on the ground in bloody heaps.

They present themselves as willing to do things that lesser warriors might wilt at. A feature in the (London) Independent described life in the regiment's garrison town, Aldershot: "Hard-drinking, brawling evenings, interspersed with elaborate rituals involving the consumption of vomit, urine and excrement." Evenings regularly ended with a stomping march back to the barracks lustily singing "Tomorrow, Belongs To Us," "When We March on England," or the regimental anthem of Goering's World War Two paratroopers, "The Fallschirmjager Song."

'Killing? You long for the opportunity'

"Killing?" one para was quoted, "You long for the opportunity. You wait your life for the chance to slot someone."

The paras' self-image is vividly on show in the case of Scouse McLaughlin.

McLaughlin, from Liverpool, was seen as a hard man by the hard men of the Third Battalion. In the battle for Mount Longdon in the Falklands in 1982, he fought his way towards the top despite bullets having ripped the flesh off much of his body. He was killed by a direct hit from a mortar. He was recommended for a posthumous VC.

However, he was also reported by a Para officer for what amounted to war crimes, bayoneting prisoners to death and mutilating their bodies. The officer queried whether McLaughlin would be a suitable recipient of Britain's highest award for, as the phrase goes, gallantry. The award was withdrawn - to the rage of his comrades. Their attitude to the dainty rules of the top brass was eloquently expressed in "The Ballas of Scouse McLaughlin", a doggerel song which has featured of many a para reunion:

"Scouse he was a green-eyed boy/like the Airborne in Vietnam/ or the German Fallschirmjager/in the retreat from Stalingrad/It's not the Ruperts and their rules/tactics and strategic skills/At the end of the day wards are won/by men who'll fight and kill."

It was men such as these who stormed into the Bogside to shouts of encouragement from the Commander of Land Forces on Bloody Sunday.

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JACKSON SPECIALISED IN COVERING UP ARMY CRIMES

Jackson was the Parachute Regiment's scene-of-the crime tidy-up man.

His role on Bloody Sunday had been presaged in Ballymurphy the previous August when 10 unarmed civilians were shot dead over three days following the introduction of internment without trial.

At the long-delayed inquest into the Ballymurphy deaths in May 2021, Jackson admitted having been in the vicinity of the killings - but not really as a soldier. He had been acting in an alternative persona, he explained, as "a hybrid of community relations and press officer." It was in this hybrid capacity, he recalled, that he had told journalists that the Battle of Ballymurphy had been precipitated by an attack on the Paras by "about 20" gunmen. The soldiers had opened fire in response. The battle had lasted "two or three hours."

Nobody else, civilian or soldier, in any interview or presentation before or since, has mentioned this prolonged and surely unforgettable experience

Jackson couldn't understand why none of the Ballymurphy shooters had afterwards been asked about the circumstances in which they had fired. "It simply doesn't add up… It may have been the whole system was overwhelmed by the mayhem of that week… I don't know."

Five months later in Derry, he was to show that he'd learnt the lesson: in the aftermath of a massacre by your men - don't leave the detail of the engagement to chance. Make up a shot-list and stick to it, even when it becomes blindingly obvious that it's all a load of baloney.

SPYCOPS INFILTRATED BLOODY SUNDAY MARCH ORGANISERS

An Inquiry in London in 2021 showed that we still have some distance to travel before reaching the full truth about Bloody Sunday.

The remit of the "SpyCops" Inquiry under Lord Mitting didn't extend to Bloody Sunday. But the overlap between the issues has been obvious.

The Mitting Inquiry was set up by Theresa May's government in 2014, in response to complaints from political activists and a series of articles in the Guardian exposing the working of the National Public Order Intelligence Unit.

The NPOIU was an undercover unit attached to the Metropolitan Police. It had infiltrated political organisations and campaigns over a number of decades, not to seek evidence of illegality but to disrupt and discredit campaigners and the causes they espoused.

Among the groups it had infiltrated was the family-led Stephen Lawrence campaign which sought the truth about Stephen's murder by racists in London in 1993 – and about the failure of the Metropolitan police to pursue Stephen's killers with any semblance of seriousness.

The long-term infiltration of single-issue, anti-war and rank-and-file trade union groups involved undercover officers luring campaigners into phony relationships and, in a number of instances, fathering children with those they had targeted. The ruthless cynicism of the State, the contempt for the lives and bodily integrity of ordinary citizens, was never more evident.

The link to the Derry massacre emerged when a member of the SpyCops operation was revealed as having also infiltrated the organisers of the Bloody Sunday march.

When Saville's report on Bloody Sunday was published, many in Derry, including the leaders of the main Nationalist parties, took it as the last word. The finding that all of the dead and wounded had been innocent of any wrongdoing seemed sufficient unto the day.
But we know it was far from the full story. Evidence to the Mitting Inquiry revealed that NPIOU agent "Sean Lynch" had graduated from spying on Irish political groups in London in the late 1960s to membership of the NI Civil Rights Association in the early 1970s. He had not been a passive member of Nicra but an activist, travelling between Britain and the North in the months prior to Bloody Sunday.

Nicra was engaged in organising the Derry march - a major undertaking for a relatively small association. It would be implausible to suggest that an active member of the group might have remained oblivious to this activity.

How was it that Lynch wasn't mentioned either by name or code-name over the 404 days of evidence to the inquiry? How come that the involvement - even the existence - of the NPIOU didn't rate a footnote in the findings?

What reports from the North did Lynch send to his NPIOU superiors in London during this period? Did he have a direct role in organising the march? Did he take part? What were his orders? How many other agents of State institutions whose existence has never been acknowledged were involved in Nicra around the time of Bloody Sunday?

Lynch was no ten-pound tout or scavenger for tittle-tattle. He is recorded as having served as a "manager" within one of the NPIOU's associate organisations, the Met's notorious assault unit, the Special Demonstration Squad, between 1982 and 1984.

"Lynch" has since died. But the information he, and almost certainly others, will have reported back to London is of obvious relevance to Bloody Sunday. The fact that we only learned of "Lynch's" existence from a separate inquiry in 2021 is itself of some significance.

MURDER ON THE SHANKILL

Many Unionist politicians' disregard for their "own" community in its relations with the British army was clear when they sang dumb about the killing of Richie McKinney and Robert Johnston on the Shankill Road eight months after Bloody Sunday.

Mr. McKinney, 49, married with five children, worked at Mackies engineering. He was shot in the heart as he drove along Matchett Street.

Robert Johnston, 50, single, a labourer, had just come out from the Wee House bar on Manor Street seemingly slightly drunk. He was waving and shout ng, "The meek shall inherit the earth," when he was hit in the heart from across the road.

There had been rioting in the area earlier, but a sort of calm had returned

Bloody Sunday soldiers "F" and "J" fired the fatal shots

'Paras will kill anybody'

If they hadn't gotten away with massacre in Ballymurphy and then in the Bogside - or assumed that they had - they might have thought twice before killing Mr. McKinney and Mr. Johnston.

The Paras would kill anybody the top brass told them it would be OK to kill. Religion or community identity wouldn't come into it.

The moral and message to the Shankill should be - Let them away with it there, they'll come for you here - especially if your own political leaders have been applauding them at every turn.

Associating yourself with the Paras is ill-advised in any circumstances.

BRITS WANTED TO LEAVE NORTH AFTER BLOODY SUNDAY

The cynicism of British leaders towards the North was on open display at a meeting in Downing Street on the Friday after Bloody Sunday.

The gathering included PM Edward Heath, Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas Home, cabinet secretary Burke Trend, deputy secretary Neil Cairncross and Heath's private secretary, Robert Armstrong - the full college of cardinals - and, for the North, Prime Minister Brian Faulkner, cabinet deputy secretary Kenneth Bloomfield and Faulkner's principal private secretary Robert Ramsey.

The minutes show no sense of regret on the British side for the massacre carried out by their army the previous weekend on the streets of a city within their jurisdiction. This wasn't to be wondered at. British ministers have been shrugging off mass killings of various peoples for centuries. It's part of their tradition.

There was no indication either that any of them had any feeling of kith-and-kin with Brian Faulkner or with the community which he had come to Downing Street to represent.

Heath asked whether "there would be any support (among Unionists) for…ceding the Bogside and Creggan to the Republic." Faulkner asked what Heath imagined the implication of such a move might be for Catholics in Belfast. The minutes record no answer.

Heath outlined the current UK Government analysis of the North: "Opinion in Great Britain had reached the stage where a considerable element asked how much longer British forces could be exposed in such circumstances. This element could be expected to grow if there was serious trouble again at other (civil rights) demonstrations… Major concern had been expressed at the cabinet the previous day."

(The suggestion less than a week after Bloody Sunday that it was the British Army which had been put in harm's way would be breath-taking if we hadn't been long used to the British ruling class's characteristic combination of arrogance and ignorance when it comes to Ireland.)

Maudling reported that Tory backbenchers were not on-side with Stormont either. The (backbench) 1922 Committee "felt they could not continue on the present course." Heath added that, "There was a growing feeling (within the army) that they could not go on indefinitely."

How would Unionists react to a border poll, asked Heath? They'd see it as putting a question mark against Britain's commitment to the union, answered Faulkner. But if there were a majority in the North for a united Ireland, Maudling pressed, surely the Unionists wouldn't stand in the way?

Faulkner said that army chiefs in Belfast believed that they could restore order in Derry by using more subtle tactics. Carrington mentioned that, after his years in the Foreign Office, "He could not remove from the back of his mind a slight reservation about the army's tendency to be over-optimistic."

Douglas-Home suggested Nationalists might be offered a third of the ministries in a Stormont government. "Would that not satisfy them?" Faulkner responded: "How could a MP elected on a united Ireland ticket be credible to his own electorate as a member of a government trying to improve…Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom?"

Maudling commented that he "had dealt in other days with (Kenyan leader) Jomo Kenyatta (and) was conscious of the unexpected things which could become possible in changed circumstances."

There was much more along the same lines. How about a British commitment to maintain the link with the North for 20 years and then call negotiations on a new settlement, Maudling wondered…? This implied British-Irish negotiations on the border by 1992.

The British side took no responsibility for Bloody Sunday, implicitly blaming the Unionists instead and offering them the frugal terms apparently still on offer today.

The notion that the Paras might have anything to say sorry about obviously didn't enter the sanctimonious minds of the bevy of Brits confronting Faulkner. Nor did the notion that Britain might owe a bit of loyalty to the union.

Supporters of the union today who mark the Bloody Sunday anniversary by putting out Para flags should catch themselves on.

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DUBLIN POLITICAL ELITE SPURNS FAMILIES

The determination of political leaders in the Republic not to be diverted from looking after their own patch and their own interests was starkly illuminated when Bloody Sunday campaigners came to Dublin looking for help.

In 1991, the families invited more than 30 TDs and a number of political correspondents to the launch of "Bloody Sunday in Derry - What Really Happened?" at Buswell's Hotel, across the street from the Leinster House parliament. Copies of the book were sent out in advance with the invitations.

No-one from any Dublin newspaper, and only one member of t.e Dail, Independent Dublin TD Tony Gregory , turned up

The Irish president, feisty feminist and fighter for civil rights Mary Robinson, twice refused to meet a family delegation. She relented after a number of campaigners travelled from Derry to parade with placards outside her official residence in Phoenix Park.

The head of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Cardinal Cathal Daly, refused the meet the families. Examples abound from this period of Bloody Sunday campaigners being given the brush-off by the Southern elite - in stark contrast to the convoy of limousines snaking across the land bringing the high and mighty to show themselves in Creggan mourning for the Bloody Sunday dead.

The political context was to shift again a few years later, facilitating the campaign in again finding a sympathetic audience in the upper echelons of Dublin politics and among the populace generally.

Mainstream parties re-engage

The Provisional IRA called a ceasefire in 1994. Its armed struggle, however righteously waged in the minds of its leaders and volunteers, had never attracted majority support among Northern Nationalists, much less among the Irish people as a whole. The abandonment of armed struggle and the commitment to constitutional politics which this heralded, eased the way for mainstream parties in both islands to begin to reengage with Bloody Sunday.

In 1995, Taoiseach John Bruton appointed a senior civil servant to liase with the Bloody Sunday families and keep the Taoiseach's office abreast of developments. This was the first time a Dublin administration had made the search for the truth about Bloody Sunday a matter of Government policy.

Bruton was the leader of the largest party in government, Fine Gael, a thoroughly respectable outfit with impeccably conservative views. The fact that he was now on board signalled that the Derry massacre was no longer to be seen as a dangerous subject: there was now a "Bloody Sunday desk" in Government Buildings.

In June 1997, Bruton's successor, Bertie Ahern of Fianna Fail, presented new British PM Tony Blair with a 178-page assessment of where the Bloody Sunday issue now stood. A covering letter told Blair that, "I believe that your approach to this issue can help to remove a source of profound distress not only to the relatives but to the nationalist community generally." The campaign by the families and their supporters had thus pushed the issue onto the agenda of British-Irish relations at a key moment.

In 1991, no representative of any main party had turned up for the launch of the first book explicitly to call for a new Bloody Sunday Inquiry. Six years later, a family delegation was being welcomed to meetings in Dublin successively with Taoiseach Ahern, Bruton, Labour Party leader and Tanaiste Dick Spring, Democratic Left leader Proinsias De Rossa, Progressive Democrat deputy leader Bobby Molloy, and a handful of Independents who had been able to book a slot in the families' schedule.

In January 1998, Blair announced in the Commons that a new Bloody Sunday inquiry would be established. One of the key original demands of the campaign had been met.

RAGE AND RECRIMINATION ON 'DAY OF RECONCILIATION'

Within an hour of publication of Saville's report on June 15th 2010, harsh words were being exchanged in the Guildhall corridor between a senior British Government official and a prominent member of the Bloody Sunday March Committee. The focus of the disagreement was a statement which it was proposed should be read on behalf of the families to the crowd of thousands crammed into Guildhall Square.

"That will have to be changed," the Northern Ireland Office representative declared, not hiding the intensity of her anger. She had just had sight of the statement. The passage which had provoked her ire read: "The victims of Bloody Sunday have been vindicated. The Parachute Regiment has been disgraced...It can now be proclaimed to the world that the dead and wounded of Bloody Sunday were...gunned down in their own streets by soldiers who had been given to believe they could kill with perfect impunity.

"The repression that came upon us is the same as is suffered by ordinary people everywhere who dare stand up against injustice - Sharpville, Gronzy, Tiananmen Square, Darfur, Fallujah, Gaza. Let our truth stand as their truth too.."

That wasn't the note the British official wanted or expected to hear struck. When it was explained to her that the statement had been read to and endorsed by the families less than an hour previously, her fury seemed to rise. She literally stamped her foot. "Everybody was agreed this was to be a day of reconciliation!"

But even as she spoke, the families were trooping out of the Guildhall and being greeted by delirious applause. The statement was read out from a platform and triggered another wave of cheers.

The incident begged questions: Who was the "everybody" who had agreed in advance that publication of the report might be an appropriate moment for "reconciliation." And who was it envisaged might be reconciled with whom?

"Reconciliation" in the North generally refers to the Catholic/ Nationalist and Protestant/ Unionist communities coming together. But this notion of reconciliation couldn't neatly or logically be made to apply to the circumstances of Bloody Sunday, in which the Protestant/Unionist people had played no part.

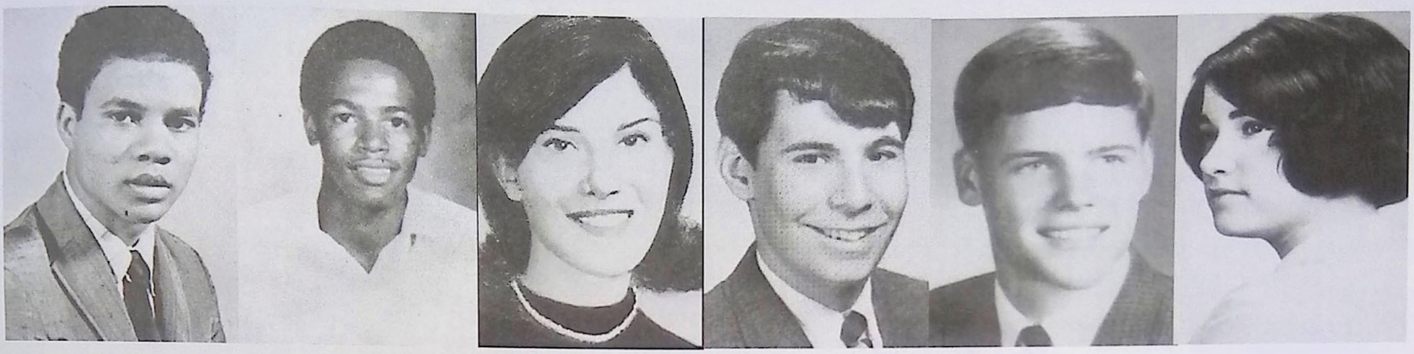
Bloody Sunday, it bears repeating, was a very British atrocity. The reconciliation to which the Northern Ireland Office was gladly looking forward was not between the supposedly incorrigible communities of the North but between the Bogside and the Brits.

This conception of what was afoot was abundantly confirmed in the following days. British newspapers, from the bottom-rung tabloids to the snob Sundays, predicted and promoted the idea of a Royal visit to Ireland sometime soon. "Queen set to seal the deal," and so forth. And so it came about. In May 2011, Queen Elizabeth made stately progress in her motorcade along the boulevards of Dublin and Cork to the warm approval of a friendly throng.

Some of the findings in Saville's report heralded a fine day for Bloody Sunday campaigners. Some other findings, or absence of findings, meant it wasn't a bad day for the British ruling class either.

BLOODY SUNDAY: 50 YEARS ON

HUGE HAPPENING ALL OVER WORLD'



Above: Philip Gibbs and James Earl Green, shot dead by police in Jackson Mississippi on May 15th 1970. Alison Beth Krause, Jeffrey Miller, William Schroeder and Sandra Scheuer, shot dead by Ohio National Guardsmen on May 4th 1970; Below: Jan Palach, who self-immolated in Prague in January 1969. All aged between 17 and 20, they gave their lives for civil rights.

MISSISSIPPI PANTHER PROTEST ENDS IN MURDER

Eleven days after Kent State, two students were killed at Jackson State College in Mississippi. They had been among a crowd of around 100 demanding action over the police killing of Chicago Black Panthers, Fred Hampton, 22, and Mark Clark, 21, three months earlier.

A car was set on fire. Firefighters who arrived faced stoning and asked for police support. Seventy-five police units swiftly descended. Protestors rushed for shelter into a student dormitory.

Police said later they'd been shot at by snipers from all directions. Two policemen reported injuries from flying glass.

At least 40 police opened up on the dormitory with pump-action shotguns. More than 150 rounds were fired in 28 seconds. Every window on the front of the dormitory building was shattered.

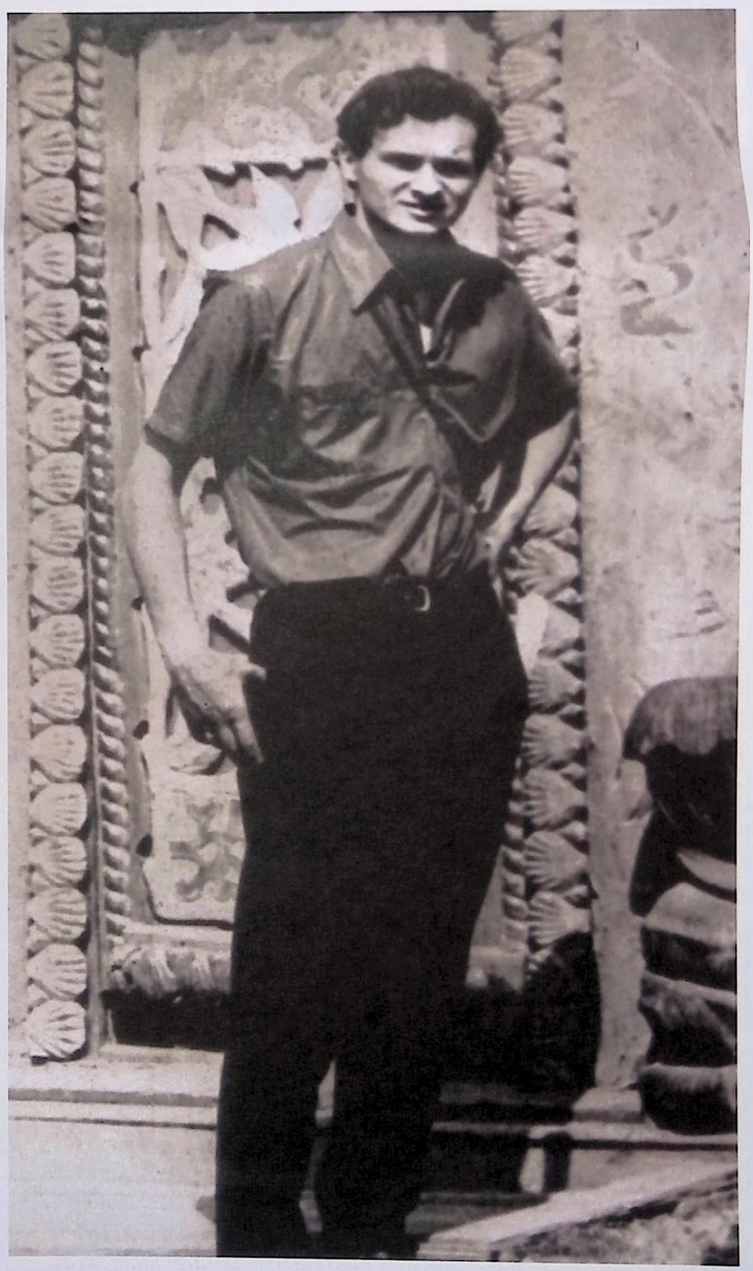
Phillip Lafayette Gibbs, 21, and James Earl Green, 17, were riddled to death. Twenty others were wounded. All were African-American. A FBI search found no evidence of snipers.

A Grand Jury heard from 66 patrolmen and police officers but couldn't agree on issuing indictments. Civil Rights groups kept pressing the issue.

On the 51st anniversary, May 15th 2021, an apology was read from the stage at Jackson State's graduation ceremony. State officials declared that the killings had been wrong and "should never have happened."

The killing ground has been named the Gibbs-Green Plaza. But none of the shooters or the politicians who had called for the suppression of black protest in advance and defended the killings afterwards has ever paid a price.

The Jackson State event is scarcely mentioned in histories of the period, probably because the victims were black.



BLOODY SUNDAY: 50 YEARS ON

DUBLIN BACK-TRACKS ON BOGSIDE SOLIDARITY

In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, a tidal wave of solidarity with the Bogside seemed to swamp the South. Protests against the massacre packed every city centre. Shops, factories, offices and schools emptied. Gatherings of all sorts were cancelled. Buses and trains came to a standstill. Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports closed.

On February 2nd, the Irish Times reported: "The British Embassy in Merrion Square, Dublin, was burned down yesterday after the biggest demonstration the Republic has seen in a generation…Along the route, thousands joined the march and many thousands more waited in Merrion Square while, with muffled drums and black flags flying, the main body of protesters arrived."

All members of the Dail, so it seemed, issued statements damning Britain to hell and competing with one another for the vehemence of their denunciations of the Parachute Regiment. Some came close to suggesting that maybe the gun was the only answer after all.

A deluge of dignitaries descended on Derry for the funerals. These included 14 members of the Government, President de Valera's personal representative, 32 backbench TDs, 17 Senators, the mayors of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Kilkenny, Galway, Sligo, Clonmel and Wexford, the general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, the president of the GAA, archbishops, bishops, serried ranks of priests and other notables of one sort and another. Many relatives of the dead couldn't get into the Creggan church.

A single-column story in the same day's Irish Times struck an oddly off-key note. "The Army Chief of Staff, Major General T. L. O'Carroll said yesterday that the force was well-equipped to deal with internal security."

In the Dail debate on the day after funeral deputations returned from Derry, the main emphasis was not on the need to rally the plain people to hold the British army to account, but to deflect the anger the army's actions had given rise to.

Taoiseach Jack Lynch spoke of "men who, under the cloak of patriotism sought to overthrow the institutions of this State…The institutions of this State will be upheld without fear or favour. The laws will continue to be enforced. Those who seek to usurp the functions of government will meet with no toleration."

Opposition spokesman Richie Ryan lamented the torching of the embassy. "Now the anarchists, those who hoped to destroy the institutions of the State, know that if they could get sufficient numbers of people behind them, they could do untold damage."

The speeches were studded with expressions of sympathy with the bereaved families and fury at this latest outrage visited on Irish people by perfidious Albion. But the debate left no room for doubt that the main issue on the minds of the parliamentarians had to do not with the role of the British in the North but with the perceived threat to stability in the South.

A bill was introduced the following week authorising recruitment of 600 additional gardai. Opposition Justice Minister Tom Fitzpatrick feared this might not be enough: 2,000 would be nearer the mark. And "something would have to be done about training and equipping (them) to cope with crowd control and riot situations. "Any outstanding pay claims" should be conceded without further ado. Veteran Dublin Fianna Failer Sean Moore intervened to up the ante to include "any legitimate grievance."

At the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis three weeks later, Justice Minister Des O'Malley announced "to prolonged applause" that a number of Northerners recently acquitted of arms charges in the District Court would be re-arrested forthwith and recharged before a judge and jury. The Government would not rule out "Special Courts" if these measures proved insufficient.

John Healy wrote in the Irish Times: "By far the most significant thing - and one with far-reaching consequences…was the absolute absence any feeling that the men of the North belong to the moral community of Fianna Fail..."

Just weeks after the North had seemed to have become a raw and visceral reality in politics across the island, the leaders of the Southern State were proclaiming their disengagement and determination to crack down hard on anyone who in the name of the North persisted in disrespecting the Southern status quo.

Bloody Sunday made it plain that no resolution of issues thrown up by British State murder in the North would be acceptable to the Southern establishment unless its own interests were guaranteed. This has been a powerful factor in dictating the trajectory of negotiations and investigations into Bloody Sunday and much else ever since.

The Great Wall of Derry

It was Bishop Berkeley of Derry who, in a roundabout way, inspired the slogan, "You Are Now Entering Free Derry."

The words were painted on a gable wall in the Bogside early in the morning of January 5th 1969. There had been rioting in the area the previous evening. The RUC had withdrawn under a hail of stones and bottles. The slogan was scrawled on the side of a terrace house on St. Columb's St., in the middle of the area which three years later was to become the Bloody Sunday killing ground.

Bernadette Devlin/McAliskey was on the platform at the Wall with a microphone in her hand waiting to speak when the crack-crack of the rifles came from the bottom of Rossville Street. The ground around the Wall was suddenly carpeted with the bodies of marchers flinging themselves down.

The fact that death has swirled around the Wall on the Bogside's worst day consecrated the slogan as the defining statement of the area's defiance and of the civil rights years in Derry.

The slogan didn't originally refer to Derry, although there was a connection. The slogan was taken by Eamonn McCann from a picture of a placard outside Berkeley campus of the University of California during a student occupation in 1965. It was inscribed: "You are now entering Free Berkeley." The college at the time was at the epicentre of the student Free Speech Movement and so a singularly appropriate place for a restatement of Berkeley's radical ideas.

Bishop Berkeley had spent four years in America. He was devoted to founding a college for the education of "Indians." In an era when native Americans were regarded by white people as savages without souls - in order to justify killing them - Berkeley's venture was far ahead of its time

Berkeley College was founded in the name of Bishop George Berkeley, previously Bishop of Derry. He had left Ireland to spend four years in Rhode Island, devoted to founding a college for the education of "Indians." In an era when native Americans were regarded by the colonists as savages without souls - in order to justify killing them - Berkeley's venture was far ahead of its time.

There is a picture of George Berkeley on the wall in Weatherspoons in the Diamond in Derry city centre

Berkeley college was to provide an arena for radical dissidence in the years which followed World War II. The area attracted writers who were to reshape the assumptions of American literature - Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassidy, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and others who gravitated towards the Pacific strip running down from San Francisco.

Ginsberg completed one of the greatest American poems of the 20th century, "Howl!" in Berkeley in late 1955. It was first performed at the City Lights bookshop on Columbus Avenue in San Francisco the following January. Ferlinghetti, manager of City Lights, was charged with obscenity. The trial was one of the decisive moments in the history of struggle for free speech.

The "Howl!" judgment established that "redeeming social value" in a creative work is a sufficient defence against a charge of obscenity. The precedent has since been cited a thousand times at least across the world in defence of works threatened with censorship on grounds of obscenity.

A few years ago, one of the leaders of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, Lenny Glaser, came to Derry as a guest of the Foyle Ethical Investment Campaign (FEIC). Glaser was at first disbelieving, then delighted, to learn of the Derry dimension of the Berkeley story.

In 2020, following the police murder of Georg Floyd in Minneapolis, demonstrations against police violence broke out in cities across the US. In Seattle, protestors drove the police out of the Capitol Hill area and erected a wooden replica of Free Derry Wall with the slogan, "You Are Now Entering Free Cap Hill."

From California across the Atlantic to Derry and back again to Seattle. The slogan appears in Arabic on walls in Gaza.

Free Derry didn't fight only for a local or national Irish cause, but also for freedom for the whole wide world.